

**“Winter Depression: Online Self-Assessments & Resources  
For Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)”**

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When the pages of the calendar turn from August to September, the children return to school, the leaves start to turn color and fall, and the people who are most susceptible to SAD will start feeling the first symptoms of diminishing light. The first symptoms might be having less energy, losing the ability to focus and concentrate, anxiety, sleeping and eating more, and just feeling gloomy. As sunny memories of summer dissipate, the SAD sufferer nervously anticipates the winter snow, ice, cold temperatures, short days and long, dreary nights of winter in the North.

Winter blues might be considered a milder form of the condition but true SAD sufferers have a collection of symptoms which are a recognized form of clinical depression. People who have chronic depression who are stabilized with psychotherapy and medication during non-winter months, may also feel an exacerbation of their symptoms when the change of seasons occurs. SAD usually starts in September or October, peaks in January, and starts to subside in March or April.

Theories about what produces the condition of SAD point to possible drops in serotonin, or melatonin changes affecting the individual's circadian rhythms. Over the past fifteen years, the general public has become increasingly aware of the effects of diminishing light and the effectiveness of Light Therapy, either alone (for mild SAD) or in combination with an established treatment plan of medication and psychotherapy for sufferers of chronic depression.

The Employee Assistance Program has compiled some resources for individuals who are interested in learning more about SAD as well as Light Therapy. Please note that Light Therapy has some contraindications, and that worsening symptoms of chronic depression should also be discussed with your doctor or mental health practitioner.

**An online self-assessment for SAD** can be accessed through the Center for Environmental Therapeutics, an independent non-profit professional agency. You may go to their website at: [www.cet.org](http://www.cet.org) to learn more about SAD, take their online self-test which gives you a detailed printout of your SAD profile, morning/evening type, your “natural” bedtime, etc. The website also answers questions about Light Therapy, availability of light boxes, other treatments, etc.

**A free downloadable web-book** is available through [www.websciences.org/sltbr](http://www.websciences.org/sltbr), the Society for Light Treatment and Biorhythms. Go to “Public Information” for a complete list of topics of interest. The free downloadable web-book is titled “Brighten Your Life” and is linked through the websciences.org site or you may go to [www.brightenyourlife.info](http://www.brightenyourlife.info).

**If you want to purchase a LightBox** go to: [www.websciences.org/sltbr](http://www.websciences.org/sltbr) and click on “Corporate Members” for a complete list of manufacturers of light therapy products.

Before purchasing a light box, it is wise to take the online self-assessment, and read the short book, “Brighten Your Life,” duly noting the possible risks and contraindications of bright light therapy. If you continue to have questions, consult your doctor or call the Employee Assistance Program at X4567 and we will be happy to assist you with referrals, information, etc.